**Sermon Lent 4C – Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 – 27/3/2022**

**When grace doesn’t seem fair.**

**Videolink:** [**https://youtu.be/gg3h-Z3uxuk**](https://youtu.be/gg3h-Z3uxuk)

**Most of us have them don’t we**? Most of us have family members who are a bit like the prodigal son. Most of us have someone in the family who makes a mess of their life. That person who struggles with their finances, is always making bad decisions, struggles with their relationships or has destructive habits. In some families it is the person who is always making trouble for everyone else. Most of us have someone like that in the family don’t we - a brother or sister or some other relative who gets under our skin.

**And what makes things worse is when there is someone in the family who always** seems to bail them out when they get in trouble. Sometimes parents are like that. One of their children is always making a mess of things and for some reason, mum, or dad or both of them seem to have a blind spot when it comes to this particular child. For some reason every time this particular child gets into a mess mum or dad or help out. For some reason, they seem to overlook the wrong this person has been doing.

**When things like this happen in families it really annoys those members who are always doing the right thing.** It isn’t fair that this family member keeps on messing things up and it is even more unfair that they keep on getting bailed out. If it is a brother or sister and it is mum or dad always stepping in to help it makes it even worse doesn’t it. It makes it worse because it feels like they are getting preferential treatment. It feels like they are the favourite. It feels like you are not appreciated for all the effort you put in to be a good son a good daughter. Eventually you don’t just get angry with the person who is making such a mess of things you get angry with the person who is always helping them out as well. It just doesn’t seem fair.

**That is how the older brother felt. His younger brother had insulted his father.** Asking for his share of the inheritance was as good as saying, “Dad I can’t wait for you to die.” Then to make matters worse he cashed out his share of the property which put a strain on the farm income for the whole family. Then he squandered his share. He squandered what had been built up over generations, ever since his ancestors had first moved onto that land, disrespecting not just his father but his whole extended family. Then when he came back after spending all his money, instead of getting what he deserved, dad doesn’t only let him back into the same family home where the older brother is living, but kills the best calf and throws a party.

**Meanwhile, the older brother hasn’t put a foot wrong.** He has been working hard on the farm all his life. He has been the ideal son. And to make matters worse he has been working twice as hard ever since his useless younger brother left to have a good time overseas. Being the hard worker he is, the older son is out in the fields working when the younger son returns. Coming home after a hard day’s work he hears a party going on in the house. He’s been working hard and everyone else is partying, now that alone would be enough to annoy him, but then he finds out the party is for his useless younger brother.

**The hard-working devoted older brother gets angry**. He gets angry with his useless brother who has made a mess of things for him and the whole family and now has come back. And for what, to mess things up even more? He gets angry with dad because instead of giving his useless brother what he deserves he has taken him back and even thrown a party for him. He’s been a good son. He’s been working hard all his life and his dad has never thrown him a party. It just isn’t fair!

**Grace isn’t fair.** It isn’t fair that God takes back people who have rejected him. It isn’t fair that God forgives people who have sinned against him and against other people. It isn’t fair that God forgives again and again and again. It doesn’t seem fair that some people can reject God all their lives and then in the last moments of their lives when they turn back to him he is there running toward them with open arms. It is grace. It is great news for those people, but for those who have faithfully obeyed God all their lives it just doesn’t seem fair.

**Then again we are all sinners, aren’t we?** Jesus is telling this parable in response to the Pharisees complaining that he ate with and welcomed tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees had no trouble seeing the sin in other people’s lives. Perhaps it is easier to ignore your own faults if you focus on someone else’s. The Pharisees had no problem labelling others as sinners but were blind to their own sin of judgmentalism, lack of compassion and hard-heartedness. On the outside, they may have looked like good upstanding citizens, devout worshippers, and keepers of the law, but Jesus could see what was in their hearts and minds and it wasn’t very pleasant.

**When you think about it, w**hat kind of father would have rejected the younger son? The kind that bases his relationship with his children on their performance. The kind that continually puts all the good things his children have done on one side of the scales and all the bad things on the other side of the scales. Heaven help anyone who has a father like that. Just imagine living in a family where you are always being judged, always trying to meet expectations or else you will be rejected. Some people do live in families like that? Some people feel throughout their whole life that they have to measure up to a certain standard and feel like they never quite measure up. Often parents don’t even realise that is how their children feel. What kind of life is that though? Always trying to win approval. Always to be just one bad word, one lazy moment, one bad decision away from disapproval.

**The alternative to grace is a life of continually working for approval.** A life without any real joy, a life of continual uncertainty.

**In the end, we all need grace.** We all need the certainty that no matter how often we mess up we will still be accepted, still be forgiven, still be embraced, still be in the family. That is the kind of life the father offers the older son, a life where he can celebrate every day knowing that he has his father’s love. The kind of life where he knows that everything that the father has is his. A kind of life where the relationship with his father is sure and certain and full of grace and love.

Grace may not seem fair but it is the only way to live life to the full.

Grace…

overflowing grace…

abundant grace…

is what God the Father offers to you his children now and forever. Amen.

*Pastor Rolf Lungwitz*